

VZCZCXRO8397
PP RUEHBC RUEHDE RUEHIHL RUEHKUK
DE RUEHBY #0252 0720728
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 130728Z MAR 09
FM AMEMBASSY CANBERRA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1201
INFO RUCNRAQ/IRAQ COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEHBN/AMCONSUL MELBOURNE PRIORITY 6137
RUEHBAD/AMCONSUL PERTH PRIORITY 4400
RUEHDN/AMCONSUL SYDNEY PRIORITY 4351

C O N F I D E N T I A L CANBERRA 000252

NOFORN
SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/12/2019
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [EAID](#) [EAGR](#) [EPET](#) [IZ](#) [AS](#)
SUBJECT: AL-MALIKI STRENGTHENS COMMERCIAL LINKS WITH
AUSTRALIA

Classified By: Deputy Political Counselor John W. Crowley for reasons 1
.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: At a meeting in Canberra March 12, Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki and Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd agreed to strengthen agricultural and commercial links. Iraq will again buy wheat from Australia, which will also provide assistance to the agricultural and petroleum sectors in Iraq. One hundred and twenty Iraqi agricultural scientists are training in Australia in dry-land farming and Australian companies have won tenders to build hospitals near Baghdad. During their meeting, the prime ministers signed an economic development agreement, but what Iraq is really looking for from Australia is agricultural assistance. END SUMMARY

¶2. (U) In Canberra at the start of a five-day visit to Australia, Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki, accompanied by Foreign Minister Hoshyar Zebari, thanked Australia for its support in helping rebuild Iraq and said his country would buy more Australian wheat. The two sides agreed on a partnership framework in which Australia would lift its bilateral aid program, already worth \$107 million, over three years. About 120 Iraqis now study agronomy in Australia, al-Maliki said, and agriculture remained a high priority for his Government. He added that Australian companies would be invited to invest in Iraq's agriculture.

¶3. (U) Prime Minister Rudd said after meeting al-Maliki that "the Prime Minister and I have agreed that it is time to build a strong relationship based on our broad commercial and economic ties." Hosting the first visit to Australia by an Iraqi prime minister, Rudd said Canberra aimed to increase assistance to Iraq in six areas, including agriculture, public health, education and training, and security. In addition, several Australian firms had tendered successfully for public hospital construction projects. Rudd said the two governments would also co-operate closely in the training of Iraqi personnel in the oil and gas exploration industries as Australian resource companies sought to invest in the country. Later this year, Agriculture Minister Tony Burke will lead a trade delegation to deepen agricultural cooperation, including assistance for Iraqi farmers in dry-land farming.

¶4. (U) At a speech in Sydney March 13, al-Maliki emphasized improvements in the security situation and in governance, with elections now based on political platforms, not religious affiliation. Al-Maliki said, "We have to lure business and investment to Iraq." When asked what Australia could contribute, he replied that Iraq wanted help from Australia in agriculture, and also in energy.

5.(C/NF) COMMENT: Prime Minister Rudd's Foreign Policy Advisor Philip Green told us that the al-Maliki visit was a successful manifestation of what Rudd has termed "a new

relationship" between the two countries. When Rudd visited Iraq in December 2007, he asked what Iraq needed. The reply was "agricultural assistance." At their meeting, Rudd suggested signing an agreement by days end and they did so. The two sides have agreed to complete by the end of June six memorandums covering implementation of the agreement. Australia, another country with a dry climate, has significant expertise in dry-land farming, which is particularly useful to Iraq.

CLUNE